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ABSTRACT

A special education teacher's views on the 10 years since enactment of P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, and thoughts about the future of special education are offered. Characteristics of the first years following P.L. 94-142 included an exuberant pioneer spirit among teachers, informal curricula, and lack of rigor in individualized education programs (IEPs). Although current classrooms are much better supplied and IEPs more systematically developed, much of the flexibility in programming has been lost and IEP meetings often become adversarial in nature. Other trends growing out of the federal mandate include increased categorization of disabilities, increased visibility and media exposure of individuals with handicaps, and a lower morale among special education teachers. Ongoing changes in rules and frequent building changes as well as the strain of coping with the emotional impact of working with handicapped children contribute to teacher frustrations and low morale. Teachers are also concerned about the large number of related services they are responsible for and the need for maintaining quality in their profession. Needs for the future are improved teacher attitudes, the individualization of all education, better programs to aid school to community transition, more translation of research into practical programs, and better communication among all concerned. (DB)

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The Journey of a Teacher: Bridging Gaps, Traveling New Roads

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Two very special individuals share in the creation of this case study. As I began to realize the wide scope that this paper would cover, I immediately sought guidance from Dr. James Greiner, Associate Superintendent of the Wayne County Intermediate School District. His enthusiasm for my involvement in this project was matched only by his support, allowing access to his consultant staff, and time at work to pursue the issues involved. Dr. Len Rezmierski, Executive Director of Special Education of the Northville Public Schools, and President of the Michigan Federated Chapters of The Council for Exceptional Children, gave me the focus for viewing special education as a road that we travel, with gaps we must bridge. Both individuals are a source of inspiration, serve as my mentors, and they are my friends. They have served as a model of the type of administrative support that can exist for a teacher's endeavors. If they are representative of administrators across the country, I am confident that administration and teachers will join hands and successfully meet the challenges that await us.

Special thanks to Ray Telman, David Soebbing, Mary Fayad, Kathryn Mathey, Donna Sewrey and Wayne Ruchgy, who helped enormously with identifying many of the concerns in this retrospective. And to the hundreds of teachers I've talked to, I'm sure you will recognize yourself in these pages. Thank you for sharing not only your thoughts and memories, but also your soul.

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PREFACE

The information gathered to support the statements made in this case study was collected in a variety of ways. Teachers in the Wayne County Intermediate School District's center-based programs for the severely impaired responded to surveys where they identified the improvements and disappointments over the past ten years and described the present problems in their classroom. Interviews were held, both formally and informally with teachers of a variety of disability areas: learning disabilities, mental retardation, hearing impaired, physically handicapped and the speech and language impaired. These teachers, both at the secondary and elementary level, willingly shared their memories, their triumphs, their dashed hopes and their concerns for the future.

I was frankly not prepared for sadness and disillusionment that teachers expressed regardless of categorical impairment, or age of the students taught. The most alarming lesson I learned through this experience is the emotional upheaval that teachers are going through, and how this has created negativity and promoted mediocrity in the classroom. If there is any message we must pay heed to as we plan for the future, it is the emotional impact that working with handicapped individuals has had on my fellow professionals.

It is important to mention that most of this information was collected in the State of Michigan, which had special education in place much earlier than 1976. Perhaps states who are "newer" service providers can recognize some of these early concerns and learn from our experience.

THE JOURNEY OF A TEACHER: BRIDGING GAPS, TRAVELING NEW ROADS

It is of particular significance that, as you gather eight individuals to present various perspectives on special education, you have included a teacher to give voice to future directions. A teacher was chosen once before to give a "vision" of a future frontier to millions of students. What Christa McAuliffe took with her will perhaps be the legacy she left behind - a simple tee-shirt - "I touch the future. I teach." I will not be presumptuous enough to assume that my mission in this symposium is comparable to Ms. McAuliffe's. However, the comparison of these two future-oriented activities gives focus to the importance that the role of a teacher can have in impacting events that shape the lives of students.

I will take you on a journey during the next few minutes. We will travel the road of special education as a classroom teacher, following a path carved by the trailblazers in our profession. During our early travels, we will reflect on the accomplishments and disappointments of this venture since P.L. 94-142. We'll pause at the crossroads of this journey, and examine current obstacles we must overcome to continue the trip. As we take our first steps in determining our future route toward our special education destination, we will prepare for the bridges we must cross, and the challenges that await us.

> **"Can it be that it was oh, so simple then? Or has time rewritten every line?"** (from The Way We Were, by M. and A. Bergman)

Teachers remember the initial impact of P.L. 94-142 with great fondness. "We were working at _____ State Home in 1975", recalls a former teacher of the mentally retarded. "We worked with all types of disabilities...E.M.R., T.M.R., severely retarded, physically handicapped, autistic kids, schizophrenics. There were 840 kids there, and we had six classrooms. Then came 94-142, and kids who probably hadn't been out of their underwear in years were being placed on a bus for school. It was a TOTAL LIFE CHANGE for thousands of individuals."

"We waited at the school in the hallways, by the doors, to get a glimpse of our first students", adds a teacher of the speech and language impaired. "Thirty out of thirty-five of us were brand-new teachers, all hired on the same day. First year teachers, first students. The students came from a residential facility, and as they were removed from the bus, they exhibited every institutional behavior imaginable. One man in his early 20's came up and rubbed the bricks with his hands while sniffing them. He had a tear on his cheek when he turned to me and said "School. Thank you." I'll never forget it. Ten years later, I still get a lump in my throat. "Everyone was so grateful then."

The most visible improvements seemed to be with the institutionalized, soon to be deinstitutionalized, population. Educational programming, community placement and behavioral treatments for bizarre mannerisms, aggression and self-abuse have brought about dramatic changes with these individuals. But high school teachers of learning disabled students and other high-incidence disability areas believe that P.L. 94-142 rescued hundreds of kids who simply "disappeared" prior to mandatory special education. "We had one special education teacher for our entire high school of 2100 students. There just weren't services for those high-incidence kinds of kids, so they dropped out" recollects one teacher. "We lost a lot of kids who now can be very productive. Special education kids still drop out, but not because of exclusion."

The latter seventies were the years of accessibility. At the onset of P.L. 94-142, there was a general excitement at just being part of special education. There were mass hirings, and most educators were young and idealistic. A pioneer spirit existed among teachers. Special education was a new frontier, and we were following the path of greatness of those trailblazers who fought long and hard prior to mandatory special education. Money was plentiful, and there was a feeling that we could do anything. Education was THE answer, and teachers eagerly plucked programs from the hands of the A.R.C.'s, the Easter Seal's, the church basements and the Y.M.C.A.'s. Parents loved us. Their handicapped kids were going to have an education just like their siblings, and somehow it was implied that this was going to "normalize" or "fix" the handicap. And teachers perpetuated this idea of "curing" and "fixing" kids. Did we not want to be the next "miracle worker"?

Like any new frontier, special education classroom programs had little direction or governing during the latter seventies. Programs could vary vastly from district to district, even classroom to classroom within the same program. Some classrooms would be little more than arts and crafts programs, while others attempted to teach general education concepts steeped in academia. Return with me to my first classroom in 1976. I was a first year teacher welcoming a group of severely involved, autistic adolescents to their first school. The law was not even six months old, and I certainly did not understand the legal ramifications of it. I did not really know what to teach, but no one really seemed concerned about that. As long as the students were in school from 8:30-3:00, that was fine. Like so many of my peers, I used as a "guiding force" my determination that these students would know school as I had known it; that it was a marvelous environment to be in. They would know the thrill of accomplishment, the excitement of intellectual challenge, the joy of discovery, the satisfaction of creativity and the pride in self-respect and dignity. Goals, objectives and activities fluctuated between "functional/frivolous" and "appropriate/ inappropriate", but together we learned many things so many of us

take for granted: how to eat a meal, how to behave in a movie theater, how to listen to music, how to dance, the love of literature, the purpose of friendship. I don't know how I would task analyze or collect data on many of these things in today's classroom, and since many of the activities don't fit into today's IEP document, I simply choose to forget them. But Motown music, the Gong Shows and personally meeting the Chicago White Sox are cherished memories, and the laughter from the students still rings in my ears. When I saw a former student of mine from that original class, he did not demonstrate the proper greeting of shaking my hand and signing "How are you?" Instead, he smiled and signed "Going to the Chapel of Love". It was the laughter he too, remembered.

Many teachers view the early flexibility in classroom programming as an aspect that is sorely missed, and find the lack of opportunities to be creative under the present state program guidelines a major disappointment. These professionals, particularly those working with severely handicapped students, have seemingly forgot the feeling of floundering about and being hopelessly lost as they tried to decide what to teach. There are I.E.P.s in former student's files that are a source of extreme embarrassment to me when, with severely handicapped students, I heavily stressed learning the alphabet, shapes and colors as well as stacking blocks and completing a formboard. Teachers in Michigan now have mandated program content areas which at least provide a foundation for their classroom. Educators unanimously voice disappointment regarding the issue of the content of classroom programs. Reasons can vary tremendously. As noted, some teachers feel that the adoption of rigid behavioral curriculums in conjunction with specific state guidelines has hampered any efforts of creativity in their profession. But other educators state that not having had early direction in classroom programs led to what they feel is one of the greatest failings in special education - the lack of a solid course of study and curriculum for many disability areas. The search for direction and the product that would "make everything work" has led to a continuous turnover among curriculums. It appears that it is not unusual for programs to adopt new curriculums and philosophies every two years. Teachers complain they have no roots or no sense of where they are heading. Some districts have adopted a single curriculum, but tend to choose products that have been validated through research at a university. The field testing was done primarily in university affiliated sites, making replication in rural communities or urban public schools very difficult, with inappropriate use of the curriculum often the result. Teachers also voice concern that trying to emulate general education was another detour on the road to quality programming in special education.

Most teachers wholeheartedly agree that products and materials have vastly improved since the seventies. The accessibility awarded to education with P.L. 94-142 created tremendous numbers

of additional students and teachers. The availability of federal funds to support special education served as an impetus to product developers and commercial vendors to tap this marketable area. Classrooms and schools look so much better. The classroom of 1976 had a child-oriented theme regardless of chronological age. Classrooms for developmentally disabled students had an abundance of stacking rings, pegboards, colored inch cubes and formboards. Material selection was limited to products that seemed to correspond with test items. A psychological report would typically state "Student could stack five cubes, but was unable to build a seven block tower." Since this was something that was tested, and an item a child failed, many teachers felt they had to teach this task. (Perhaps this was the special education version of competency testing.) Other materials were purchased through early childhood catalogs. Teachers of the learning disabled student and of educable mentally retarded individuals report how happy they are to have been granted a divorce from the ditto machine. These classrooms in 1976 had mostly teacher-made materials, with the exception of Frostig worksheets. All teachers report the relief of not having to spend countless hours creating materials. "Adapting materials is one thing, and we still do that," reports one teacher of the learning disabled. "But we had to create things from scratch. It was like a second job. Now there are high-interest books for low-level readers. Materials are developed for particular learning styles and this has resulted in tremendous gains for the learning disabled student. We have access to the talking books from the Library for the Blind. And computer technology...what a boost!"

The classroom of the 80's is far better equipped, with materials that are more functional and age-appropriate. Teachers of students with physical disabilities report great satisfaction with the adaptive equipment for these individuals: better wheelchairs, head support systems, side-liers and eating utensils. But perhaps the most exiting dimension added to the 80's classroom has been the microcomputer. Recent technological applications in the special education classroom have given severely handicapped individuals new freedom of exploration of their environment, greater independence and new voices to tell us about it. We all cried when Serena, a cerebral-palsied, mentally retarded child, "spoke" her first words at age 13 to her mother via a voice output communication aid (VOCA). "I love you", said Serena. And to Dr. John Eullenberg, who gave her the voice, "Thank you". VOCA's, adaptive switches and microcomputers show great promise in promoting the severely handicapped student as an active learner rather than a passive recipient of information.

Microcomputers and related software have changed the lives of thousands of learning disabled students, allowing them to process and retrieve information, and express their thoughts and ideas in a more eloquent manner. Teachers attribute the decreasing stigma of being in the resource room to the special education student's

ability to use the microcomputer. "I have general education students asking to come to my room for extra help and to use the three micros", says a secondary education teacher of the learning disabled. "The stigma of coming here has vanished."

Programs and products that have been the result of a decade of work toward the implementation of P.L. 94-142 have been both the source of pride and disappointment to the classroom teacher. Nothing has impacted our profession as much as the state guidelines for special education which are based on this federal law. The remaining portion of our journey from the classroom of 1976 to the classroom of 1986 will examine the gradual fulfillment of P.L. 94-142.

Aside from the tremendous growth in the numbers of students, the first components of 94-142 that directly affected the classroom teacher was the IEP and its committee process. I can best illustrate the changes that have occurred in the development of the IEP by sharing with you my first IEPC and comparing it to the current practices. In January of 1977, all the teachers in my district were sent a memorandum that stated that we must have IEP's, complete with goals and objectives, developed and in place by the end of the month. Panic ensued! I called the first parent on my class list and explained that together we had to write up a program for Tom. Donna replied that she worked days and asked if I could meet her after 6:00. We arranged to meet at the school at 6:30. She asked if, in appreciation to me for accommodating her working schedule, she could bring dinner. Donna and her husband arrived at the school with two large pizzas and a six pack of beer.

During the next three hours, a friendship was formed that, ten years later, still exists. I was able to really know Tom, his likes, his dislikes, his relationship with his sister, the pleasures that he has given his family, the sometimes devastating effects that autism and mental retardation had on the family structure. We talked, laughing and sharing some somber moments, like we were three college kids. We wrote up a vague, one page document that was to become Tom's first IEP. The only goal his parents really wanted for him, at age 14, was to get a real "kick" out of life. Other than that, they just thought he should learn what other kids already knew: colors, shapes, numbers, writing his name, raising his hand to go to the bathroom. Surprisingly enough, that's what most of the parents of my students wanted in those early, naive years.

The IEP's were amazingly simple, not always "measurable". How do you quantify the "enjoyment of participating in community events"? And how were these early IEP's implemented? In large part, by piling one teacher, one aide and five students into a beat-up Chevy Impala and going to just about every activity imaginable. Professional sporting events, live theater performances, the symphony, movies, beaches, ethnic festivals,

open markets, museums, restaurants, and renting farm plots and growing a garden (not to mention canning our produce) were all part of the classroom that extended beyond four walls.

I met with Donna, almost ten years later to the date of that first IEPC, to take a look at how far we've come in terms of writing programs for kids. She pulled out that first document to compare with the present, and I was absolutely horrified at the unprofessional quality of it. "If CEC ever saw this", I laughed with embarrassment, "they would revoke the Clarissa Hug Award!" Tom's 1986 IEP is now seven pages long and filed in triplicate. Attached are typed reports from the multidisciplinary team that took part in the IEP process, the occupational therapist, the physical therapist, the speech therapist, the psychologist and the classroom teacher. Parents are also encouraged to present a typed report on the child's present functioning level, but Donna did not do this. There was no pizza and beer shared between friends at this last IEP. The nine people that participated in this all wore suits, Donna tells me, and all presented reports in a professional, businesslike manner. I did not hear laughter as I listened to the audiocassette of the IEP. An advocate for Tom recorded the entire IEP for Donna in the event that she ever has to go to a hearing. Tom's IEP is a professional masterpiece. There were goals and objectives (measurable ones) in leisure programming (he will learn how to use Simon, Legos and a pinball machine using a task analysis approach); communication (still trying to get him to use sign language spontaneously); vocational training (two part assembly and disassembly); self-care, daily living activities and cognitive skills that must have included at least 15 objectives! I said to Donna, "You must feel extremely relieved to see that programming is so much better and so much more accountable." She answered yes, but with certain qualifiers. "I'm not friends with Tom's teachers anymore. I don't have the same trust in the schools. I'm really saddened by that, but I don't know what to do. Our advocates cite so many examples of how kids have gotten screwed by the school systems. I'm always on the alert to see if Tom really is getting all these things that he is entitled to. Tom has had some problems in the past few years with noncompliant and stubborn behavior. He just doesn't seem to like school like he used to. So I have a better program for him, but at what cost?"

Indeed, at what cost. We both knew that if Tom's first IEP were held in 1986, we would not be friends. The IEP process is not conducive to friendships with parents anymore. What I originally loved about P.L. 94-142 is that it said to parents, "Your child is worth something to us. He can learn, and <u>together</u> we can make it happen!" We've lost the feeling of "together" in the present process. When teachers and parents sit at the IEP table, it is often with an undercurrent feeling of being adversaries. The increasing amount of investigations, complaints and hearings that teachers find themselves part of have taught them to "couch" remarks and <u>never</u> make a comment that could be used later in

court. The presence of tape recorders at IEP's is now commonplace, and this appears to have kept the process very professional, but has introduced an element of distrust among both the school personnel and the parents. IEP's are developed without any regard to the other students that are in the classroom. If the child is entitled to the service, the school has a responsibility to provide it and the burden it may place on the classroom teacher is of no consequence. Teachers report that they are increasingly being confronted with IEP's that are impossible to implement given the number of students that they program for. The paperwork generated from the IEP has steadily increased, leaving teachers feeling overwhelmed and guilty at spending less direct time with students.

The specific rules and mandated services appear to have hampered some of the flexibility of programming. Instructional hours are interpreted to be hours that occur in the educational environment, and this is a school setting, not a garden plot. Donna lamented that Tom "never goes anywhere with his classmates anymore". Increased liability, damages from lawsuits have resulted in administration curtailing trips in staff cars and participation in community events where supervision is deemed "less than adequate". "Doesn't he get to go anywhere?" I asked incredulously, given the recent push for community integration. "Well, the students get to go to the Shrine Circus, and roller-skating. And once in a while, they go to McDonald's." I find it difficult, as a teacher, to once again confine myself to four classroom walls, even though that classroom is a much improved version of the 1976 model.

But I understand that with the cost of the related services that are mandated by the guidelines, the increased cost of transportation, the increased costs of hearings and due process generated from dissatisfied parents as a result of the IEPC process, community experiences just can't be the priority I want them to be.

The categorization of disabilities is another outgrowth of the federal mandate and it has been a mixed blessing. Categorizing created a network of people who supported each other. "Consumer groups" really came of age, and the National Society of Autistic Citizens and the Association of Children with Learning Disabilities joined the ranks of long standing organizations like the Association for Retarded Citizens and United Cerebral Palsy. Evaluation tools and diagnostic processes are generally better, and with the exception of the learning disabilities teachers, there is a general opinion that kids are pretty well placed, and this increases the likelihood of appropriate programming. But the specificity of the categorical impairments has greatly impeded mainstreaming efforts. The rules for program content are so specific that flexibility is out of the question, complain several teachers. One teacher of the hearing impaired is placed in a regular school. "I have five students in my classroom.

When I suggest to the general education teachers that have 35 students in their classroom that they could integrate some of my students, they look at me like I'm nuts. Why take a few of my students and leave me with only one or two? There's a real general education backlash because of some of the numbers we have."

Categorizing had a surprising impact on some teachers. A veteran special education teacher mentioned that prior to P.L. 94-142, she taught a wide variety of disability areas. "I had anywhere from 25-30 kids, all disabilities, and I did a great job. They were a real part of the school. Then, in one year, the rules told me I didn't 'know how' to teach the emotionally disturbed kids, or my two hearing impaired girls, or the autistic boy. I could only handle 15 kids. And now, I too believe I can only handle 15 kids of a singular impairment. Despite my early joys and successes the 'rules' and the law impact your belief in yourself and your profession. And not necessary positively."

A teacher of the speech and language impaired continues along this same line of thought. "There are so many specifics as to how many services these kids need, particularly with low-incidence populations. Occupational therapy, physical therapy, adaptive physical education, speech therapy, behavioral programs, work-study...it just boggles the mind! Imagine how a general education teacher must feel in attempting to integrate a variety of disabilities and therapies: a braille printer for the blind student, phonic ears for the hearing impaired, material adaptation for the L.D./E.M.R., communication aids for the cerebral palsied student, periodic repositioning for the physically handicapped; and now we add that we want to integrate severely and profoundly retarded students and autistic kids! All to their classroom of twenty-five to thirty kids. No wonder general education hates us."

But where mainstreaming does occur, and when services can be delivered in an integrated setting, most teachers feel that there has been increased awareness and acceptability of the handicapped students by their peers. More physically handicapped kids are being integrated into general education classrooms. Severely and profoundly handicapped students are being included in regular schools, although usually in segregated classrooms. But teachers report promising efforts and attempts to include all handicapped students in non-instructional activities in regular education. The increased visibility and media exposure of individuals with handicaps has resulted in new opportunities for disabled students. What an inspiration it was for me to view the Today show recently, and see an interview with Joe Conners, a young man with Down's Syndrome, who was selected to be a page for Senator Chaffe. I'd like to think that Joe's education, provided by the tenets of P.L. 94-142, helped give him the skills he needed for that select position.

In retrospect, let's highlight what occurred during the ten years since P.L. 94-142. Tremendous gains were made in terms of numbers of students served and in the increase of the array of services now provided within the schools. The materials and products used in the present classrooms are of superior quality. The increasing integration of microcomputers and computer assisted instruction places teachers, once again, on an exciting frontier in education. The quality of IEPs appears to be more thorough and professional. P.L. 94-142 has perhaps been the greatest human rights action statement of this past decade. We can all take great pride in the strides we have made in implementing it. The visibility and inclusion of individuals in schools have resulted in a growing awareness of the capabilities and strengths of handicapped persons.

On the backside of the jubilation we feel when listing the accomplishments is the alarming emotional toll taken on the teacher. Morale appears to be at an all time low. Teachers cite how they were once the "savior" to parents and the community and now they are the "criminal". The greatest disappointment mentioned in interviews conducted with teachers is that they have had no visible impact that consumer groups and parents have noticed.

We've reached the point in our journey where we will explore the current problems of the 1986 classroom. The past events have had a direct impact on the concerns of today's teacher. As we enter this stage of our trip, we must remember that the core of education is not administrative rules, but the relationship between the student and the teacher in an educational environment. When we talk "quality education", "success in education", we are talking about the heart of the classroom: the teacher. Sadly, reports indicate that the spirit of this "once-pioneer", the heart of the teacher, has been badly damaged.

> "You, who are on the road, must have a code, that you can live by. And so, become yourself, because the past is just a goodbye. Teach your children well..."(from Teach Your Children by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young)

Special education teachers are on the road, but they do not seem to know where they have been or where they are heading. The change and rapid growth that has taken place over the last ten years has greatly contributed to this feeling of being in limbo. Teachers listed examples of the changes they have experienced in every aspect of their profession. "The biggest changes are with the rules", report several teachers from Michigan. "We finally got a grip on what the guidelines meant for classroom teachers, and now we have another set of rules with a variety of changes." "I can never feel like I'm an expert in my field", laments one special education teacher. "I can't keep up with the interpretations of the rules in light of the hearings and decisions

that are handed down. I give suggestions and recommendations to parents based on my understanding of the rules, and it comes back to haunt me. People tell me I'm wrong, and it really takes a toll on my ego."

Let me share with you a personal example of how the ongoing changes in rules can affect a teacher's "expertise". During 1985, I was awarded Michigan Teacher of the Year by our state CEC organization, "Outstanding Alumnus" from Eastern Michigan University, and The Council for Exceptional Children presented me with the first Clarissa Hug Award, honoring an outstanding special education teacher. My experience and accomplishments while working with autistic students accounted for many of the reasons I was selected for these awards. Autistic individuals in Michigan were categorized as emotionally impaired until 1983, when a new category and rules were established for the autistic impaired. An additional teaching endorsement followed, and when the rules went into effect, I was not in a classroom for the autistic so I could not be "grandfathered in". I am no longer qualified, in the state of Michigan, to teach the same students with whom I had so many successes and achievements. My experience with rule changes is not that unique.

The environmental changes are another source of stress. Most special educators have experienced at least five building changes in less than ten years. Some teachers have worked in the same program, but have had it administered by several different educational agencies. "It's hard to believe that there is any administrative commitment to our programs and our students when we are shoved around between districts", complain teachers of the severely impaired. "We have no roots, and are reluctant to try to establish any long term goals for the programs, because another administrative change means another philosophy, other priorities, and other setbacks in any progress we've made." Even when teachers stay in one building for a length of time, their classrooms are moved regularly. Many teachers report that the special education kids are given the "worst" classroom facility in the school. "We are located the furthest from any resources like the library, the gym, the office, and always the closest to the boiler room." Staff turnover is another component of the constant change faced by special educators. Teachers move on to different professions, or jobs related to education, with increasing frequency. It becomes hard to establish a cohesiveness among teachers in one building, given the moving of facilities and staff turnover.

Rarely does a school have a special educator who has been at the same site for over five years. Indications based on the teachers interviewed for this case study are that great numbers of special education teachers are going to jump to general education jobs as soon as they open up. This "mind-set" contributes to a lack of commitment to the profession, along with the emotional trauma that most special educators are presently facing.

I have had the opportunity during the past few years to present workshops throughout the United States, and to talk with hundreds of teachers about our shared profession in special education. I discovered an interesting, seemingly universal phenomenon that we all go through in terms of defining our purpose and role in the education of handicapped kids. We experience a "Loss and Grief" cycle similar to the process that parents go through in coming to terms with the disability of their child. My interviews for this paper confirm my belief that special educators are experiencing critical stages of this cycle. The emotional impact that working with handicapped children has on the individual is the single biggest problem facing teachers in today's classroom. Individuals who seek solutions to current and future problems in special education must have an understanding of this cycle. It merits a description of the stages teachers experience.

Teachers new to the profession of special education, whether recent graduates or reassigned teachers, approach their profession with many hopes and expectations. Much like the expectant parent, there is an element of fantasy about what "it" will really be like. Once placed in the classroom, the reality never matches the hoped for ideal. In special education, the differences between the "hoped-for" classroom and reality (much like the "hoped-for" child) are so tremendous that teachers enter a period of <u>shock and disbelief</u>. What teachers had learned, what they had hoped for, doesn't match up. So they enter the next stage: <u>searching</u>. Much like the parent who goes from doctor to doctor, therapy to therapy, looking for the answer that will bring that "hoped for normal child", so do teachers go from workshop to workshop, conference to conference...to books...journals...curriculums. We want to find the key, the answer, that will make this classroom the fantasied ideal.

But we search and search and we don't find. And like the parents of the children we work with, we find ourselves in a period of <u>detachment</u>. It is a necessary step all parents and all professionals dealing with handicapped children must go through. You have to be able to step back and really look at what you have. You must pass through this stage in order to <u>develop a personal mythology</u>. Parents go through this stage answering the question "Why did this happen to me?" Teachers go through this stage asking themselves "Why am I doing what I am doing?" This is where teachers develop their teaching philosophy, and once provided with direction, they enter into the last stage of this cycle: <u>reinvestment</u>. When teachers recognize the emotional vulnerability in special education, when they are supported through this cycle of coming to terms with emotional upheaval, they will be able to define who they are, and the code they must live by...and they <u>will</u> teach their children well.

Teachers who don't recognize this phenomenon of "loss and grief for the hoped for career" find themselves stuck in the stages of searching or detachment. Working with families who are also

experiencing stages of this same "loss and grief" cycle creates emotionally explosive relationships. There are additional stresses that add to the emotional overburden of the special education teacher. Dwindling funds for programs, increased paperwork generated by rules, and the additional responsibilities added to teaching duties all contribute to the feeling of being totally overwhelmed most teachers say they experience.

Special educators see a large gap between community agencies and the school. Many teachers feel that with the concept of "related services" the school is expected to provide everything and that agencies are not assuming their responsibilities. However, a school social worker offered an interesting perspective on why this occurred. "We've alienated many of the community agencies to whom we could once turn for support. Many groups were providing some kind of day program to handicapped kids when P.L. 94-142 came into effect. We, as educators, in essence told them that we could do a far better job, and eagerly snatched programs from their agencies. If the agency people providing 'instruction' were not teachers, we disregarded any suggestions they might have. We are now paying for our early arrogance." The departure from providing types of direct service programs for handicapped children has enabled agencies and consumer groups to take a role of advocacy for children. Since special education is a service provided that has rules and laws, it follows that teachers are now in positions where they are "violators" of the rights of students. This contributes to the animosity that can exist between school and agency personnel. A representative from Protection and Advocacy explained, "It's not that we believe everyone else is doing a wonderful job and you're not. It's just that you have a system in place where we can pinpoint violations, and we can nail you." Districts have begun to establish inter-agency collaboratives to address many of these program issues. Educators and agency personnel are sitting down and drafting agreements to determine responsibilities of the school and the department of mental health.

My experience with these types of committees and advisory councils has been promising. However, when I attend as a representative of the teaching profession, I often experience a barrage of comments on the failings of education and of teachers in particular. It will come to pass that agency personnel will stop throwing the pieces of chalk at the teacher, and then they will be able to use it to write out goals and dreams for handicapped individuals that we can cooperatively achieve.

Teachers feel put upon to provide services that are not necessarily teaching activities. They are asked to conduct parent groups, and given their vulnerability, are not usually very successful at it. Parents want them to contact community programs to get information on after-graduation programs, on recreational programs, on medical services and other similar items. "Many times, much of what I am asked to do as a classroom

teacher falls more within the realm of a social worker or a therapist", says one educator. "It's hard to keep a perspective as a 'teacher', and what a teacher's role is."

Related services have resulted in the teacher's need to become a master engineer at integrating therapies within the classroom. Many students have programs in occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, and adaptive physical education that teachers are expected to implement. Programs are often designed by these program specialists, on an individual basis for students, and given to classroom staff to conduct. Teachers sometimes resent this delivery of related services which places the responsibility of implementation on them. "I'm not a therapist", exclaims one teacher. "I have a hard enough time trying to teach, much less master four additional disciplines." The inclusion of more severely handicapped students in public schools has resulted in teachers performing some medical tasks in order to maintain the child in the classroom. I visited one classroom of severely multiply impaired students whose teacher complained that the students didn't need a teacher, just a full-time nurse. Indeed, two children were using I.V.'s, there was a student who had to be catheterized, and a child who was fed using a tube. And although there was a nurse assigned to the school, the teacher did end up performing some of these tasks. A distinction must be made between medical services and "related" educational services.

Lastly, teachers are gravely concerned about establishing and maintaining quality in their profession. The Nation at Risk report implied that we had a large part in committing an act of war on the children we so dearly love, and it is an accusation that still stings. Many teachers expressed concern about the newly hired professionals in special education. They feel that the new teachers lack the drive and ambition that is so needed, and that they are not bringing enthusiasm and new methodology and ideas to the field. All teachers expressed the need for continuous, on-going inservice, and felt that inservice must take different directions than the one day a year they are presently allotted. They would also like to have a lot of input into what the content of that inservice should be. "So many times, we just are simply not asked what we need, and decisions are made by individuals far removed from the daily grind of the classroom. When we are asked, it is a courtesy, with the decision already having been made. I know many administrators think we are always complaining, but it is because we are placed in positions where we must be reactive instead of proactive," adds a teacher of the severely impaired. There are strong feelings regarding the competency testing movement. All teachers interviewed felt strongly that ineffective personnel must be removed from the profession, and that we can no longer afford to carry them. However, there are adamant feelings that competency testing cannot take the form of retrieval of information or testing the acquiring of a body of knowledge. "The qualities that people say

they want in teachers are not measurable in test scores. How do you test for creativity, adaptability, love of learning, or the ability to inspire?"

Our look at the 1986 classroom can perhaps be viewed as a rest stop on our travels along the path of special education services. Today's teacher faces challenges that are not going to be solved with more rules, new texts, improved products. It is a transition time for the classroom teacher, and before we can carry on into the future, we need to refuel, revitalize, and recommit ourselves to our profession. We need nurturing and support through this difficult period, we need to remember how far we have come, and we need direction as to where we are headed. We need to know what it is we really want to accomplish with handicapped individuals as we head into this next century. We need affirmation of the important role we play in the lives of these handicapped individuals. "I touch the future. I teach." That is our code. And we will teach our children well, while preparing to address the challenges of that future.

> **"Could it be, yes it could...something's coming, something good, If I can wait - Something's coming, I don't know what it is, but it is gonna be great!"**
> (from Something's Coming by Stephen Sondheim)

The past was a battle for access, and in this past decade we have made great strides in getting kids in the door. Our quest for education for all handicapped children in many ways mimicked the civil rights movement. Advocates, parents, consumer groups and others have won (in Michigan) as much as we can get if we continue to believe that the only way to benefit handicapped students is through administrative changes, rules and laws. What has made us successful in the past will not necessarily carry us into the future. Our efforts to make programs more functional have resulted in the loss of a key element critical to successful classrooms. We need to put the "fun" back into functional. Teachers believe the challenges and direction for the future may be as easy as "A, B, C."

A: Attitudes into Action

Our venture toward the future direction of special education requires that we take the same bold strides towards improving our attitudes that we did in improving accessibility. Our examination of the current problems facing teachers revealed that they have encountered an emotional phenomenon that has created great stress and is adversely affecting the classroom. State and local administrative leadership must make every effort to assure professionals, parents and new people to the field that the classroom is awarded the status it deserves. This can be accomplished in large part by a change in their own attitude. One of the frustrations I have encountered since receiving award

recognition is that my peers and my supervisors assume that I will now seek an administrative position. "That recognition will look great on your resume, and things are really opening up for women administrators," I was repeatedly advised. It is a paradox that what you receive recognition for, as a teacher, is what you must move away from to obtain respect in this field of education. Not one teacher I interviewed mentioned increased wages as a method of improving their opinion of themselves as professionals, but asked for respect, for value, and most of all, to be included in the policy making that so greatly impacts their lives.

Educational leadership has made great efforts to improve the teachers educational performance by addressing skill development in the cognitive domain. These same efforts will further enhance the teacher's skill in the classroom when inservice begins to address the affective domain of the educator. Teachers will then have the tools to meet the challenges presented with burn-out and emotional upheaval. And they will have better attitudes about themselves, the work they do, and the students they serve.

Let's also re-examine our attitudes about the handicapped and focus on the changes we need to make. First, they aren't individuals who need to be "fixed" or "cured" and this new attitude will require that we reconsider the remediation model for service delivery. And we must acknowledge that the individual who has a handicap is a total person, not a fragmented set of problems. The similarities between disabled and temporarily abled are far greater than their differences, and this makes the needs of handicapped children similar to the needs of their nonhandicapped peers. I am reminded of my favorite scene from the movie "Mask" where Cher, as Rusty Dennis, is enrolling her physically disabled son in a new public school. The administrator registers shock over the appearance of Rocky, and suggests that a "special school might be better able to meet his needs." "Do you teach math, biology, and algebra?", asks Ms. Dennis. The principal replies yes and the mom states, "Great, those are his needs."

B: Back to Basics, and Bridging Gaps

Special education teachers support moving back to basics, but their perception of "basics" may be a bit unique to those who equate the basics of education as reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. Let's value learning again, not solely what is learned. Let's celebrate learning again, not solely reward kids when they learn what we value. While we are in the process of getting back to basics, let's share what we have known all along, that we don't need to have general education, or regular education, or basic education, or special education, because our direction in the future is that all education is special. Education is a process in which children learn to live in their environment - and this requires that we individualize all

education, not fit all kids into narrow curriculum processes because they appear to result in higher test scores. Handicapped individuals are beginning to advocate for themselves. Their increasing vocal ability requires that we really look at the needs of the students, and that we accept that the needs they express may be a bit different from when we spoke for them.

We must build bridges that will enable us to most effectively provide needed services to handicapped students in early childhood programs and in secondary programs. Collaboration with community agencies is a great start in this direction, and education can take a leadership role in establishing interagency agreements. We need to look beyond the walls of the classroom if we accept the belief that education must prepare a child to live in his environment. The educational environment may extend to include community based teachers, a classroom established in an industrial park, in a computer lab or in a performing arts center. New delivery systems within school settings must be explored, particularly with secondary and vocational education. The idea of departmentalized secondary education should be carefully examined, as it holds promise for future delivery of special education services. Teacher consultants in West Bloomfield, Michigan are team teaching with general education teachers. Their special education students are part of the general English and history courses, with the teacher consultant adapting the materials and concepts for the handicapped individuals. Working hand-in-hand, these teachers have begun to bridge a tremendous gap in secondary education.

Funds need to become available that will enable teachers to assist students in the transition from school to community life, whether it is in a group home, a work setting or other community activity. A recent conversation with a community placement professional working for the department of mental health highlighted this gap. She complained that severely handicapped individuals past school age are coming to her with no marketable skills for placement in jobs. I replied that teachers complain to me that they don't know what is available after school is over. We agreed that if community placement individuals could identify skills needed for placement and share them with school personnel, then teachers could begin to teach them. We didn't come to an immediate solution to this gap, but we began to talk, and to build a bridge.

Another gap that desperately needs to be "bridged" is with research. All teachers felt that research needs to be brought into the real world of education: the classroom. More research should be conducted by school systems on site. There needs to be more attempts by researchers at a university level to translate the results into practical applications that can be used in the classroom given the state guidelines in special education. There has been tremendous progress in the treatment of maladaptive behaviors among the severely retarded, but much of the studies

are conducted in clinical settings and cannot be replicated with the ratios and restrictions found in public schools.

Bridges DO need to be built, and perhaps it is a function of the cooperatives and intermediate school districts to facilitate their construction. The Wayne County Intermediate School District has begun to include department of mental health personnel (group home workers, administrative staff, placement individuals) in any inservice for severely handicapped students. A recent correspondence from A.H.S. Community Services was inspiring. "Your organization has opened up a whole world of resources to us. Most important, you've developed a forum where we can sit down with educators. Our 'frontline' people, the group home workers, can meet your 'frontline' people, the teachers. Thank you."

C: Communication, Commitment, and Creativity

Let's begin to talk. Advocates, parents, administration, and teachers need to join forces and put the same energy into programming that we did to get the rules. We need to focus on synthesizing the rules into a package that is able to be creatively implemented into the classroom. We need more conversation with agencies to avoid duplication of services, and to insure that the services provided are the ones individuals need.

Let's demonstrate commitment at every level and in every relationship that impacts a child's life. Leadership at the state and federal level needs to know how their decisions greatly impact what happens in the classroom. School Boards of Education need to know that same message. Both groups need to have more direct contact with classroom programs, with handicapped students and teaching staff. They need to take a more active role in visiting special education programs, in meeting students and teachers so they can walk away with a visual picture that will assist them in decision making. Teachers need to revitalize and demand excellence of themselves and their peers. University personnel must make every effort to teach new and exciting ways of working with handicapped individuals, and their staff must revitalize also.

Let's demonstrate creativity. Let's value the ideas from teachers and provide them with a forum to try out new methodology. Let us accept the notion that all education is special, and as we travel into the future of special education, let us never forget that there are many paths to the same destination.